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Rudolph Marxer Oral History Interview: Polar Bear Oral History Project

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POLAR BEAR ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Mr. Rudolph Marxer

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Hope College Archives Council
Holland, Michigan
1977



Mr. Rudolph H. Marxer

LENNING: Were you drafted into the army?

MARXER: Yes.

LENNING: How did you become an engineer?

MARXER: Well, what it was, I went into Camp Custer, and we got in there at night about eight or nine o'clock. And where they took us into were two or three lieutenants sitting there, and they were looking for somebody for engineering units. And they started talking to me, and they wanted to know if I did any high school football or if I did any track work in high school. And one of them was quite an athlete; he had been a coach someplace. And he said, "You know anything about engineers?" And I said, "No, I've worked in a drugstore." And he said, "Well, maybe we can get you in the medical corps in the engineers." And that was how I happened to get in the engineers.

LENNING: Did you get in the medical corps?

MARXER: No, I stayed an engineer.

LENNING: And you trained at Camp Custer?

MARXER: Camp Custer.

LENNING: Could you describe your training experience there?

MARXER: Well, it was kind of rough and hard at first. And when we got in Camp Custer, the first night we went, they marched us down there. It was about eleven o'clock at night, and we had to go out and fill our straw ticks. We had to go out and get the

straw, and they'd give us a tick and we'd go out and fill it and bring it in. And there was no roof on the building and it rained the first night. Boy, I thought, "I wish I was home!"

LENNING: What did they teach you at Camp Custer?

MARXER: Well, we did mostly infantry work for the first two weeks, right out in the field with marching around. And I'd had no military service of any kind. And they just trained us. And then they brought us in, and we had a supply sergeant by the name of Bill Rainey, and he was sick about half the time. And Captain Axtell said, "You worked in a store? Maybe you can go and work in the storehouse." That's where the engineering equipment was, and that's how I happened to get in the storehouse in the engineers. And I worked in the storehouse all the time.

LENNING: Where did you go after Camp Custer?

MARXER: Camp Mills, Long Island.

LENNING: How long were you there?

MARXER: About two weeks.

LENNING: And then you sailed to England?

MARXER: Sailed to Liverpool.

LENNING: What was that voyage like?

MARXER: Well, it was kind of a rough affair. It wasn't very smooth. It was kind of--the boats weren't like they are now. It was like--the mess hall had water in it about half the time, if the sea was rough, you know. I stood in water a couple of

times and ate. The pumps weren't working on the boat. But that's the only bad experience we had on that voyage.

LENNING: Was it an American boat?

MARXER: An American boat, yes.

LENNING: Did you continue training in England?

MARXER: Yes, we continued training in Aldershot.

LENNING: What were your impressions of England?

MARXER: I had plenty of work to do around the equipment and stuff going in to Aldershot and getting ready. And then we were in Aldershot there, and we stayed there. We trained in England, too. And I did some athletic work there; I did some racing there. We had the British--the King's Guards were stationed next to us. They had to have a track team, and they wanted to know if there was any Americans that could run, and I could always run like the dickens in high school. I went over and won a couple of medals--gold medals from the Queen or something. And that darned bunch I was with! (laughter) You see, and they had no ice in England. We had to drink that warm ale just as warm as that. You know the boys! They probably told you that! (laughter) They all said, "Go and get beer--got to get you a lot of beers, friend!" Well, that was in Aldershot. And then we shipped from there, yes.

LENNING: Your battalion was separated...

MARXER: From the other companies, yes.

LENNING: When did they go to France?

MARXER: They must have went to France right after we left for Russia.

LENNING: So you left first?

MARXER: I think we did.

LENNING: But your equipment was sent ahead to France?

MARXER: Yes, our equipment was all sent to France from America here and landed in France. And they were waiting for us. We thought we were going to go to France, and all of a sudden we woke up. I knew that we were going to move two or three days before we moved because I was supply sergeant. 'Cause we had some equipment that they gave us in England, see, and then we went on British. All British--see, everything was British that was issued to us.

LENNING: Did that cause any problems? Were there different calibrations or measurement systems?

MARXER: We got the equipment issued to us when we got to Russia--my equipment and all I needed for the engineers. We had 135 bicycles up in Archangel. I don't know what for, but we had bicycles. (laughter)

LENNING: Were they ever used?

MARXER: No! They stayed in the warehouse! That's a picture of the warehouse I showed you there, that one picture there. Down there, that's the warehouse. That was full of stuff. Then we left England.

LENNING: When did you first realize that you were going to Russia?

MARXER: About three days before. About two or three days.

LENNING: Who told you?

MARXER: Oh, kind of a round about way. One of the sergeants there said to me, "Do you know where you're going? We're going to Russia" I said, "You're crazy." No, all of a sudden we got on the train and away we went. Up through the North Sea.

LENNING: What did you know about Russia then?

MARXER: Well, I didn't know anything about it, see. But there was a "Y" man on there, and he was telling us all about it, we were going into a wilderness there, you know. "God," and he had been there before, and--bunk-shooter, you know, he was. We went up there, and, God, we sailed up the Dvina River, and Archangel City was more modern than Benton Harbor and St. Joe is now! It had street cars and everything' (laughs)

LENNING: What did you know about Bolshevism before you left?

MARXER: I didn't know too much about that because we hadn't heard much of it in this country, except that the Bolos--the Bolsheviks are the Communists today--and the Cossacks were there. All the Russians talked about was how great the Cossacks were, you know. The Bolsheviks had just overthrown the Csar and Csarina before we got there. When we landed there, it was just over there, see, they had just taken over the country. It was in awful shape. Archangel City was a city of, I would say, about the size of Holland. It had 146,000 people coming

into it, young people, all kinds of them piling in. You can imagine what that was like. And that was only about three months before we got there. And not too much food to feed the people either.

LENNING: Did your officers give the men any lectures or information to prepare you for what you'd encounter in Russia?

MARXER: Nothing much, no. Ours didn't even--no....

LENNING: Could you describe your voyage from England to Archangel?

MARXER: That was a rough one. That was a rough one.

LENNING: What ship were you on?

MARXER: We were on the Grampion. It was a freighter. Did you have any of them other fellows from it? I'm pretty sure we were on the Grampion.

JOHNSON: It wasn't the Tydeus?

MARXER: No, it was the Grampion. No, there was a lot of boats. There was a lot of boats in it, see. And eight bunks were built, four high on a side, in the hold, see. And you had to cover that hold up at night, see--the planes would go over and could see if you'd light a cigarette. It would get hotter than the dickens. And, Ah! The rotten smell! And you can imagine sleeping there, on the bottom. Oh, brother, you can't realize what it was! That was a rough one, see. And then some of them got sick, quite sick, you know. I could eat anything; I still can. Nothing bothers me. But I've seen men there that would

lose forty, fifty pounds on that trip. A very good friend of mine, Herman B., went down to nothing. Pat Haley was catcher for Connie Mack's ball team in Philadelphia, and he was a great big burly guy. I don't think he ate two meals the whole time we were on that damn boat. He couldn't. He couldn't keep it down.

Oh, and some of them poor guys. It was rough. Up and down, just like that. Just like it's a cork in the water, the boat was, see. It was a rough affair. I bet the other boys told you some, too. Oh, brother, I felt sorry for them because I could take it. But Herman came to me one day, and he wanted to know what to do. "Well," I says, "if that mess sergeant can get you some tomatoes, or a can of whole tomatoes, just"--and that's what helped. That juice in the tomatoes ate the acid up. Then he did all right. But everybody was on it, then there was no tomatoes left, see! (laughter)

LENNING: What kind of medical treatment did those stricken with the flu receive? Were there doctors up there?

MARXER: Yes, there were doctors. There was one from Philadelphia, Major Henry. And there was a dentist on there--Lt. Roll, he was a dentist. He was drunk all the time after we got to Russia, though, 'cause he got British rations. He got British whiskey. We couldn't have it, you know. The American army was dry in that first world war. In the Second World War, why, they could get it. But then some of them boys were really down in the mouth, and not having their five o'clock cocktail hour they came back after they got used to the food. The food was different. See, we wasn't used to mutton in the American army. And while we was in England that's all we had was mutton. And we had a lot of it, you know. You know, mutton gets about that much tallow on the top, (gestures) and you

get kind of tired of it. And I'm not a mutton eater, but I'd eat it! (laughter)

LENNING: When did you debark in Archangel?

MARXER: I just can't remember the date. We got off the boat in Archangel city, it must have been September. Early September, yes.

LENNING: What were the initial reactions of the Archangel residents to the arrival of the American troops?

MARXER: Well, at first, it seemed to be pretty good. All they was looking for was something to eat, you know, in Archangel city. And cigarettes. "Cigarettes, cigarettes, cigarettes." That was it, you know. And food. Food was very short up there at that time because they just didn't have it; that's all. They'd just been overthrown, see. And they weren't used to a lot even under the Tsar, because the Cossacks would come through the farms and take things and stuff like that. That's why they'd overthrown the Tsar. And the Bolsheviks were going to make it better under the Communist regime. But the eggs were very short, and milk. And they were all short under Communist Russia. And people were hungry. And we had hardtack, you know. You could get anything for hardtack. So we fared pretty good. We had rations, you know, but they were British rations. And our cooks got used to making stuff different.

LENNING: Did you have any other impressions of the city or the people?

MARXER: No. See, I was raised with all different nationalities. And I knew what was proper. It was hard at first to get acquainted with the people, you know, in the city. The Jewish people controlled

all the jewelry stores, and the banks were all Jewish controlled in Archangel city, see. And the theatres were Jewish. They had theatres there, just like in a modern city. But that's about the only thing I can remember.

We had pretty good officers, all of ours were. Our captain was a good guy. And they were all mostly Wisconsin men. And one was a lawyer, and Captain Maxwell was an engineer from Wisconsin.

JOHNSON: What were your first duties in Archangel?

MARXER: Well, mine was mostly getting lined up, you know, on the supplies. The warehouse we showed you here--that they transferred from Archangel city out across the river to a place called Bakaritsa. Across the river there, and we had a warehouse there, a big one. And that's when we started building. You know, the stuff was coming in off the transports, see. They had another boat that came from South America that had a lot of infantry men on it, see, and engineers, too, coming in from England. And they got this flu, ohhh boy. . .it was rough.

And you see, we had very few hospitals. Archangel city had hospitals, but not Bakharitsa and all them villages out there. So they went and made straw beds in there for them. And they died like flies there. And then they shipped them all back to England. And now this other stuff you read about the cemeteries and stuff here. A lot of them soldiers were shipped back, I guess to England. When I was reading all these articles today, I wondered what they did to all them bodies--and they weren't all ours, either. There was Englishmen and everybody else, see. But I felt sorry for some of those fellows, laying up there with no medication. And the men weren't used to it. I remember us saying, "Why don't they take a

shot and maybe it'll fix them up and make it easier on them." All we had was scotch whiskey. And they took care of a lot of that--cured a lot of flu. That's what we did about three times a day--give them a shot. It finally brought them out.

JOHNSON: Was that the only form of medication you had?

MARXER: Just about, yes. Well, there was a little quinine and things too. But there was no--penicillin hadn't come along.

JOHNSON: Did anybody on the Grampion come down with the Spanish flu?

MARXER: Yes, some of them did--the boys did. But they fought it back in Archangel city, because we were in the warehouse there. See, the British army had moved in to Archangel. And their warehouses had whiskey. We got whiskey, no matter how we got it--underneath and over and up! (laughter)

JOHNSON: Did anyone on the voyage come down with the flu?

MARXER: Yes. A little bit on the boat, but not too badly. Their temperatures wasn't as high as the temperatures over on some of them on the other boats.

JOHNSON: Did you man the streetcars when the Russians were on strike?

MARXER: I was on the back end to them for a little while, yes, when they went on strike. We had headquarters at a place called Bakaritsa station, and then you went across the river to Bakaritsa, right across. Then to go uptown into Archangel city, and Solombo

station was way down below. Well, I worked on the streetcars just a little while one morning, not too long, because I went to the Engineering Warehouse with all the reports from our company across the river, see. But the Americans were running the street-cars. (laughs) They were froze from that. See, the Russians ran them right out in the open. (laughter)

JOHNSON: How did the Archangel residents feel about the Americans doing that? Did they think you were strike-breakers?

MARXER: No. They didn't seem to think too much of it. You couldn't understand them; sometimes they'd look at you like that, you know. And you wondered what it was all about. You see, the Bolsheviks had just overthrown the Tsar and killed him and all that stuff. They didn't like the Tsar, or the Tsarina, or any of the daughters, or anything like that, but they thought it was all--it was a mixed up affair, see. And the other guys were taking over, you know, and the Cossacks were coming through the city. But people were scared, you know. They were really scared. And I could talk a little German, see, so I could talk just a little--not too good. And I could talk to the Russian people, see, 'cause they could talk to me. And they'd tell you all about it, see. And they started hiding things, like their jewelry and stuff. Because the Bolsheviks were coming through the villages, you know, and taking all their jewelry and stuff like that, you see, from these people that were supposed to have all the money. And the banks were having a lot of trouble, too, you know.

JOHNSON: How much did you know about the political situation in Archangel? Did you learn anything from those Jews that you talked to?

MARXER: Well, a little bit. They weren't too hot about it, see. The big issue was the Bolsheviks didn't believe in no religion, see. And the Jews had their church, you know. And the other churches were all big cathedrals. Coming into Archangel harbor, you could see them copper outfits, you know. You could see the Russian churches, oh, for miles when the sun would shine on them, and you'd wonder all about it. Then all of a sudden, you'd see that box out in front of the church about that big, you know, right out in front. And that was where the people dropped their money in, you know, for the church. See, they didn't have hardly shoes on their feet, under the Tsar, either, you know. And they had burlap sacks and stuff in the wintertime. And this was in September, and it was still warm, but could you imagine what the winter would be? And they were complaining because the Bolsheviks took their boxes out of there, see. And they closed the churches; they closed all the churches. I went in the villages, and the churches were all smashed and all that stuff. And they got rid of the priests. You don't know where they went, but they were gone!

JOHNSON: Did you know that they had overthrown the Archangel government the night before you landed?

MARXER: Oh yes. We heard about it from that fellow from the "Y" because he was stationed right on the same boat we were in.

LENNING: Not the Russian government; the city government.

MARXER: Oh, the city. No, I didn't know that. But they had quite a time there for a while because over there they had a big sawmill. And it was run by all women, and you wondered why. See, and they had picked up all the men. The Bolsheviks had took them out. And there was them women.

But that little kid in that picture, that little one--we used to clothe him and everything. He worked around in the warehouses, and in our bunks there all the time. (laughs) But I felt sorry for the kid. He was looking for his momma all the time. And he called me in Russian, "Bolshi." It means "big". "Melenki" means small, see. I was "Bolshi Sergeant." Ed Denooyers or the other guy, was "Melenki," which meant "little sergeant." They were always looking for us. And rubles they wanted, too. They got smart towards the end; they wanted rubles. They could go to Archangel and buy stuff, see.

JOHNSON: What do you think the Archangel residents wanted as their form of government? You said they were scared, but what do you think they wanted?

MARXER: I think they wanted to get out from under the tsar. I do, I think so. They wanted to get out from under the tsar, 'Cause you know, up at Bakaritsa, right up from where we were at that warehouse, was where the Tsar and the Tsarina and them lived. And that was their Summer Palace. You should have seen the stables up there. Oh! Elaborate things and their homes up there on the Dvina River, you know--great big, all log cabins, and all beautifully painted and everything, and big fences around as high as this house all around. And that's where they'd go in the summer.

LENNING: You said that the Archangel residents didn't like the Tsar--

MARXER: I don't think so.

LENNING: What do you think their opinion of the Bolsheviks was, or their attitude toward the British martial law government?

MARXER: Well, I think they thought that the Bolsheviks were going to make them like the Tsar--rich, like the Tsar. I think they painted them that kind of a picture, see. See, they were going to be big--they call it "bolshoi"--because they "Oh, the Communists are bolshoi." "Bolsheviki, bolshoi". Oh, they used to tell me that over in that sawmill, them guys that worked over there in that sawmill.

JOHNSON: Did you ever think that the Archangel residents might have thought that the Allies were there to restore the monarchy?

MARXER: I think they had some feeling back when we landed there. And the only reason I think we were there was to keep the Germans from coming in the back way into England, see, down through the North Sea. See, they were coming in the back way because Russia had been overthrown. And I think that's what they thought, and they didn't like the Germans any better than they did us before we was there. They liked us after we was there, 'cause we fed them and everything. But it was one of them things. I think that's what Archangel city people thought. But after they found out that we were going to protect them there, I guess, from coming down through--they were going to come right down through into Archangel and down through the North Sea and go down inland, see. And that's why we

were up there, 'cause I was up there till the next July, and everybody had gone home. Way up there--God! we were up there in July yet the next year. They were parading in Detroit! (laughs) And there we were up there. (laughter)

JOHNSON: Did the Archangel residents get stricken with the Spanish flu also?

MARXER: Yes, they did too, yes.

JOHNSON: Did that create any tensions?

MARXER: No. Well, a certain percentage of it did.

The biggest trouble was down at a place called Solombo Station. It was down at the end--down by the river. A great big river down at Solombo Station, and the river flooded over down there a lot. And the dysentery--oh! Mosquitoes and big flies, you know, and they'd bite you. And when I was there, this was in July, and some of the infantry had left--that's when they hit us. See, we were down there. And we had to boil the water right away when we found out that we were getting disease. And this dysentery wasn't like the dysentery we have here because we had no medication, see, only castor oil. And they'd sit on these--we had troughs up there for bathrooms. They'd put a big cupful of castor oil on the seats 'cause they'd sit there for six or seven hours trying to get that dysentery to run right through them.

And then we were ready to go home in September, and the boys got it in our outfit. They got it bad. And you had to walk to the boat; it was about two miles and a half to the boat. They wasn't taking patients out because that would be a germ going out of the country and all that--the dysentery. We got them on the boat. (laughs)

They all got on, but some of them were pretty sick. And then the disease--the venereal disease, it made you shudder. Because I knew about it through drugstores, you know. But our troops -- generally were pretty good. I don't think there was over two that lost their wages through venereal disease out of the whole bunch of them. Out of two hundred and fifty in our company, there were two guys. They were from Detroit. They got cured up there, and they went home, see. They made state arrests of them, when we got back in Brest.

JOHNSON: Were they court-martialed?

MARXER: Yes. They lost their pay and everything.

JOHNSON: Whose command were you under?

MARXER: In my company?

JOHNSON: Yes.

MARXER: Captain Axtell.

JOHNSON: What did you think of him?

MARXER: A pretty good guy. He was a pretty good Joe. And then we had Lt. Johnson; he was a lawyer. And then Carroll, he was another one. He was a second looey. Johnson was a first looey. And Captain Axtell. I liked my officers. I had no quarrel with them. I had a lot of Wisconsin men in my engineering outfit--157 of them from Wisconsin. But you see, the 339th Infantry were mostly from Detroit.

JOHNSON: Did you ever have any dealings with any of the British officers?

MARXER: Not too much. They gave me quite a rough time because I was supply sergeant. I would get supplies from them. They always gave me quite a rough time, especially, you know, like wintertime. Like we had what they called Shackleton boots. They were canvas boots like this, they were wraparound. Shackleton went to the North Pole with them. And if the guys would get in marshes, you know, the water would go right through the canvas, and they'd freeze their feet. Oh, I was some thirty-five men with very bad feet.

JOHNSON: I always thought the Shackleton boots were really warm.

MARXER: Oh, they were warm. But if they'd get wet, they'd get wet and freeze. That Shackleton boot, soaked it right up, see. And they had quite a time there. And you'd have to give them some other pair. And, "We haven't got them. We haven't got them." All these guys had gloves. The engineers needed them for shoveling, you know, and moving stuff, you know, like going up and building barbed wire racks. They were supposed to be leather gloves. But they'd end up with canvas ones. Why, in no time, that barbed wire would tear them gloves all to pieces. I had quite a time getting our supplies, but I would work with some way. But food--the mess sergeant had trouble because it was all under British rations. And we would start out and we had these little Russian horses. We probably had thirty head of them. The Russians all rode their own horses, you know. The government paid for it. And we'd load it with barbed wire and with rubber boots and stuff when the spring was coming--and axes and shovels and stuff like that. We'd start out then, you see--one in front and one in the back. We'd probably go, oh, twenty miles a day. And most of the time I would go to a place called Shuska. It was about twenty-two miles from Archangel City. And then they

would cut across country this way, and they would travel pretty fast. It was rough up there, you know. And then it would be cold all the time, you know, see. And you couldn't build fires until you got to that point because if you did, the Bolsheviks could come through the woods and get you, you know. (laughs) They'd take a pot-shot at you once in awhile.

But the Russian people were alright. They were just like any Russian or Polish people, you know. When you walk into a Russian house, and if there was twenty people there, you'd go around the room and "Dross, dross, dross," all the way around. That's the way they are, see. And the same when you leave: "Das vidanya." That means "good-bye." You've got to say, "Das vidanya, das vidanya, das vidanya..." all the way around. That's the way they were, see.

JOHNSON: Did you ever encounter any Bolsheviks in Archangel?

MARXER: Oh, yes. There were a lot of them around there.

JOHNSON: Did you ever talk to any of them?

MARXER: Sure. Yes, there was one that we had. We were having trouble with supplies, and the trains going down to what they called the 91st Verst Pole. And when we'd load them trains up with like barbed wire and stuff like that, they'd always hit them trains at night at a certain point. And this damn guy worked for me. He was a carpenter in that damn warehouse. (laughs) And he was piping them off across the river! Telling all the Bolsheviks! But what could you do? You couldn't kill the guy. He had a family and everything. He was a good carpenter--very good. God, he could do anything with an ax. He'd build a table

like that (indicates living room end table) with an ax. You should see though, they're quite handy with their hands. They make stuff like houses of logs and stuff--and all hemp-packed. They'd pound hemp in there to keep them warm. People can't realize how cold it got up there. And all they had, you know, at a place like this was a house. You'd walk in, and the stable would be over here. And you'd walk in like a door like just like you would come in there. And then you walk in and then there's a big stove built right up in the wall, all out of bricks. And that's where a lot of them slept, up there on top of that stove. They'd build a fire in there, see. And then they'd pull that fire at night, and then that little stove would be hot. That's how they heated them houses. And that's the way they all lived--the average, well the average one would probably have eggs once a year. And milk they were always after. And there were very few cows. See, it was rough there for them people, you know. And they ate a lot of black bread. And I ate it a couple of times, it was just like eating a stone, and blacker than the dickens. (laughs) Tougher than hell!

JOHNSON: Did you know how the Bolshevik prisoners were treated in Archangel?

MARXER: No, I didn't hear much about that. I didn't know too much about that. I think that the Bolsheviks knocked off a lot of the moneyed ones in Russia after the Tsar was killed. After they killed the Tsar and all them--'cause they went in and cleaned house, you know--see, that's the bunch that's in now. And they always bragged that they would be "Bolshi." You see, when we first went in there in 191⁸/₂ they'd just been overthrown. Then

another year later, they were trying to build up--they were getting stronger and stronger and stronger, you see. And, the country didn't go down under Bolshevism, but it wasn't too good under the Tsar, see.

JOHNSON: I meant the political prisoners in Archangel, the Bolsheviks who were arrested. Do you know how they were treated?

MARXER: I don't know how that worked?

LENNING: Did the British arrest them?

MARXER: Yes. Yes, the British were moving in there. We had a lot of British troops up there. We had quite a few French troops up there, too, with us. They were stationed right in Bakaritsa, where I was. They didn't soldier much, they'd just go around there.

LENNING: Did you ever see Colonel Stewart? The American in charge of--

MARXER: ...all the supplies up there. Colonel Stewart was up there, in charge of everything. And he was in Archangel city, Stewart was. Yes, that's where he was, yes. I had no dealings with him. I got all my orders through Engineering Headquarters. My commander's name was Colonel Morris. That's where I got all my orders from, was Engineering Headquarters down in Archangel. Then I would go back to Bakaritsa. And the same with Company "B" of the 310th.

JOHNSON: Was the Engineering Headquarters in Archangel commanded by the British?

MARXER: No, Americans. Axtely was in charge of our company. And the infantry, I think, was controlled by Stewart. Well, a lot of it was, oh, the command and all that stuff--it was so mixed-up that nobody knew what it was all about on account of the country being in the shape it was in. You didn't know what to do next, you know.

LENNING: How much did you know about the purpose of the mission while you were in Russia?

MARXER: Nothing. I didn't know a thing about it when we went up there. We didn't know what it was all about. When we come back, everybody asked me, (laughs) and I couldn't tell them nothing! "What do you know? What'd you do up there?" [I said,] "What the hell do you expect? Frozen brain!" (laughter)

LENNING: Did you know that the Americans were put under British command only on the condition that they would stay out of the civil war?

MARXER: I didn't know that.

LENNING: That's what Wilson...

MARXER: Yes. It sounded a little like that when you was up there. It's "Keep your nose out of it. We're in charge." Ironside was the commander of the troops up there. He'd come along, come strutting in where that warehouse was, walking in there with his cane. And everybody'd jump at attention. And old Ironsides would come in. One morning, he come dashing in there. He said, "Who was in here last night?!!!" I said, "I don't know." And that was just the day before Thanksgiving.

I'll never forget it. I saluted him. He said, "You in charge?" And I said, "Yes, this is my warehouse. Why? What's the matter?" [He said,] "Oh, was you in this warehouse last night?" And I said, "Yes, I guess I was in here. What time?" "Oh, eight-nine o'clock." "yes," I said. "I was in here. Why? What's the matter now?" He said, "Well, somebody stole twenty-three cases of whiskey." (laughs) "We wouldn't do that. Not us." (laughter) "Yes," I says, "They better not get over in that barracks. They're all drunk over there!" (laughter)

This Jim Siplon, I'll never forget. If you ever talk to him--you know, that one from Grand Haven--ask him if he knows me, 'cause I was from Muskegon. He come in there into Bakaritsa one day. He'd been 'way up the river someplace up there. And he come in, and he was sicker than the dickens. I gave him a quart of Scotch. You ask him, and he'll say, "He cured me of the flu!" (laughter) Oh, we nailed them for a lot of stuff there--food, flour, mocha. God, you could sell that to the--God, every Russian wanted to buy "Mocha, mocha, mocha!" (laughter) That was true with flour.

LENNING: What did Ironside do about this?

MARXER: Oh, nothing. He couldn't. He was going to take it over to Engineering Headquarters. Must've been it wouldn't be his men steal it; I don't know. But we'd stand right in front of him and lie like hell. (laughter)

LENNING: What did you think about him?

MARXER: He was all right. There was nothing the matter. He was a soldier; he was a British soldier. He was a rough-and-

ready. He was a great big guy, dressed like--oh, immaculate, just like that; his uniform, everything, shining. Well, he didn't polish it himself. (laughter) His help polished it. I liked Ironsides for that part. I got acquainted with him after a while, after that few incidents there.

And then we had a little trouble there for a while because they were stealing everything like compasses and stuff, you know. They could sell them, you know, see, down in Archangel [on the] black market. Cigarettes was the black market.

LENNING: Since you didn't know Wilson's conditions on sending troops over there, you never questioned the legality of the orders?

MARXER: No. No. We learned that when we went it. We were soldiers and that was it. And you see, the older fellows did. Probably some of them thought they weren't right. Some of them were twenty-eight, twenty-nine years old, some of these guys that were in with me, you know. And I was only twenty-two, see. And see, young kids, according to them. And they wondered what the hell it was all about. Well, when they pulled the infantry out, though, and we sat up there and waited, we wondered, "What are they going to do--bury us up here?" (laughs)

LENNING: Where did you go after Bakaritisa?

MARXER: Well, I stayed in Bakaritisa right until we got ready to leave.

LENNING: You were there all the time?

MARXER: The entire time, I was in Bakaritsa, yes.

LENNING: So you never saw any action?

MARXER: No, I was not on the lines, no. I was sending supplies up continuously up there from Bakaritsa--right up that track--went right straight through Bakaritsa. I used to get out of Bakaritsa a lot, delivering supplies, though. Where George Petropolous was--I went over across, I think it was some sea over there, and he was cook over there. He'd do outside cooking. He had a metal slab about this big and about that big, and dig a hole, and put a fire underneath. And that's how he'd fry the stuff, you know, outside. We had no stoves.

LENNING: Where did you say that he was at?

MARXER: I think Shuska was the name of that. I'm not sure. But you aks him. He was over there on that front over there. And I think that was a Russian-German settlement over there, see.

LENNING: Are there any particular experiences that you had over there that you would like to tell us about?

MARXER: Well, we would start out on these convoys. And we'd get the ration for the trips. Now, if it was going to be a week, you'd get a can of corned beef and probably some hardtack and tea. And I never drank tea in my whole life. So I started out with that iron corned beef, you know. And we'd put it on a bonfire and heat it up for at night. At pretty soon--you know how corned beef is on the bottom. You end up with about three inches of tallow on the end of the can at the end of the week, see. And, boy, if you can't take it, you start breaking out. And oh! the skin trouble that some of them guys had. Too much of that fat

and oil would come out, and they'd break out. But I never broke out 'cause my old stomach can take anything! (laughs) And they always used to say that, "He'll eat garbage if it's flavored right!" (laughter) And that's the only experience I had. But, oh, some of them poor guys. I felt sorry for some of them. And we were lucky with that venereal disease in our outfit--only two out of the whole bunch. But, oh, some of the...

LENNING: We lost a little bit of conversation when the tape stopped. You were telling me about the size of your detachments and the rank of men generally in charge.

MARXER: Sergeants, and once in a while--very few times a lieutenant--very few times. But about, oh, probably fifteen men to thirty men on big detachments. And medical corps would follow through sometimes, you know.

We had one young fellow, he wouldn't carry a gun. He had something religious--and we had one with us. He was a good soldier, very good--anything, he'd do anything when he worked there. But he would never carry a gun. He would go in with the medical corps. And he went out and picked up a lot of our men off of the field, and there was all that snow out there and everything. I felt sorry for that poor guy. He got bloodied up, but he pulled through. I think he's alive yet. He was quite a guy. He came from that Philadelphia.

We had 21 of them conscientious objectors march in when I was dishing out clothes, in Camp Custer. You know, getting ready to go over. They didn't want to go into the service, you know. They brought in their lawyers from Philadelphia. They didn't refuse to go, you know, to soldier, but they wouldn't take a

gun. They worked hospital, they did anything--cleaned stables, did anything--we had two of them with us. Good guys. Anything they wanted done--they didn't care. They would go and sit up in them--what they called--where they had these machine gun nests--some outpost that wasn't used any more the Russians had got that close to it, you know. They'd be right out there in front. They didn't care, they'd sit out there. And they were lucky" it seemed like somebody was with them, 'cause they'd come back, come walking back in a couple of days.

LENNING: You said that a seargeant was generally in charge of the detachments...

MARXER: Yes, yes.

LENNING: because there was such a shortage of officers...

MARXER: Shortage of officers, sure.

LENNING: and you said that this was unusual. You mentioned a friend from Detroit...

MARXER: Yes.

LENNING: What was his name?

MARXER: Fred Jerkins, yes.

LENNING: And he had been...

MARXER: ...in the service before, yes.

LENNING: and he had said that this was unusual...

MARXER: Sure, because in the service the lieutenant was usually

in charge, you know. Anything out of--that's why they make all these lieutenants, you know. Sergeants are in charge, but the lieutenant is in charge of everything. He goes back for orders from the lieutenant, see.

LENNING: You also mentioned that the supplies were thin.

MARXER: Yes.

LENNING: And that often times the men had more work to do because the detachments were smaller?

MARXER: Yes, sure.

LENNING: How well would you say that the men were trained for the jobs they had to do?

MARXER: Well, I don't think--I don't want to say anything--but when you think of the Second World's War, and the soldiers that were going into Italy and into the Alps, like the skiers--I never had a pair of skis on, or snowshoes on my feet in my life. And we didn't either, most of these guys around here. We didn't have snowshoes or we didn't have money to buy skis in them days, us guys. And when we got there we'd have snowshoes and stuff. But we didn't know--especially skis, especially. And them Frenchmen, you know that came up there, them Frogs--they could go through the woods just like--why, you'd see them buggers here--they'd be up there six blocks away before you could turn your head, hardly! That's how fast they could go, see. And they could go right through the woods.

LENNING: Because the French had been trained for it?

MARXER: Trained. They had been trained. They had been trained in the French Alps, you know. And then they tried to learn us, in that little while. And it couldn't be done. But, the equipment was there. I had enough skis and snowshoes in that damn warehouse (laughs) to supply the army in France! The Americans got soaked--you paid for it. Your dads and mothers paid for it after the war, you see. The British collected on them. Them darn coats we had, I think they charged back the United States a \$114 a piece. Just for the coat for us guys to wear up in Russia.

JOHNSON: Was the clothing adequate?

MARXER: Yes, well, it was adequate if it wouldn't have been for the conditions--if we could get them. Like, well, we could get into trouble. 'Course, they were warm. Them big fur hats were warm. But, it was rough getting them, you know. They didn't want to dish them out. I talked to Ironsides about it once, and he said that he'd see that we got it. But that didn't do any good. He could talk to this guy and then he'd walk on the next one and...talking did not help.

JOHNSON: How common was frostbite?

MARXER: Oh, very common. Quite common. They'd say, "Don't rub snow on it," so, we didn't (laughs) put snow on it. I didn't have too much trouble with that stuff. My skin must have been oilier, 'cause some of them, especially the blonder ones, oh, they'd frost just like that--their noses, you know. Something different about the body.

JOHNSON: Was it very severe?

MARXER: Oh, yes. Very common. What we would do for somebody--like chilblains, you know, on your feet--we'd take salt and vinegar. That's what we rubbed them with. That would kill them--'cause they would itch like the dickens. I had them for a little while, but then I thought of what my mother used to use, and that was vinegar and salt.

JOHNSON: What type of quarters did you live in up in Bakaritsa?

MARXER: Well, mine was that boxcar most of the time, it was in that boxcar. But, we had barracks there, you know, right back off where that warehouse is, back over there next to a creek. And we had wooden stoves, and we'd stoke them with wood. And there were big pans of water on the stove.

JOHNSON: Was it warm?

MARXER: It was warm, yes, because we'd keep it warm. It was only a wooden thing, you know.

JOHNSON: What were the sanitary conditions like?

MARXER: Not very good. There was no Lysol or any of that stuff. And everything was rough--and ours wasn't too good, in our warehouse, where we were too. The restaurants and things like that were not too clean, and theatres weren't. There were restaurants and a theatre in Archangel city. And the guys would get in some of these restrooms, and they wouldn't be scrubbed, you know. And the Russians would use them and we'd have to use them. It was one of them things.

The only soap I could find in the whole darned country was Lifebuoy soap. That's all we had. And, boy, I bought all the druggist

had up there. (laughter) I got so I could talk a little Russian. He'd talk Russian to me--and he had a drugstore called "Med-Shope". He had Lifebuoy soap, and I told him to get some more. He was going to get me some from England, but never got it. But, they had no American soap. Then we had soap there, made from fish stuff--fish soap. Oh, I'd be out in the garden and you'd smell me in here! (laughs) That's why that trouble was, you know: all under British rations. They hung on to the soap for themselves--the good stuff--and gave us the junk! (laughs) That's what all the boys are saying, too, I bet--that them British didn't treat us very good. But they didn't.

JOHNSON: Did Archangel have modern plumbing?

MARXER: No.

JOHNSON: How about opportunities for bathing or changing your clothes?

MARXER: Oh, nothing like that. They'd smell a little bit. That damn Walt Carlson up from Cadillac he was the clean Swede, we called him the "Clean Swede." And that damn Eddy Haines, the Sable sergeant. So that darn Swede--my sleeping bag was always loaded, some damn thing biting me or something, you know. And we'd fill that darned thing full of insect powder. When you'd get in it, it'd just go "pouf" like that. And Carlson was always bragging, "nobody's putting that damn stuff in my bag." And he had a separate place where he'd sleep--in the kitchen with the mess sergeant. We went in and put them damn hickies in it. They started biting him that night, and that damned Haines, he couldn't keep quiet! (laughs) We'd been

drinking a little vodka. I sold more than one blanket for a bottle of vodka up there, an American blanket with U.S. on the back. See, some gal would be going down the street someday, with U.S. across there--sewed into her dress! We had times up there.

But, we all got back--except, well, quite a few of them--you'll read them in this here. I went to that burial, in Detroit, the big Polar Bear burial up there. And I used to belong to the State Association, until I organized this Polar Bear Post. But they--you get that gang together and we'll give you a lot of good stuff! (laughter)

JOHNSON: You said that you stayed in a Russian family's home?

MARXER: Yes.

JOHNSON: Could you describe that?

MARXER: Yes, sure. They treated us good. But, all they were looking for was something to eat. I don't blame them. They didn't have it. It would be just the same as you walking in here, or in any home, if you hadn't had something like flour, and you hadn't had sugar, and you hadn't had anything but black bread. And things were running shorter and shorter and shorter--you see, the government had been overthrown. It was one of them things. And them farms weren't very big, you know.

MRS. MARXER: How about beds?

MARXER: Oh, on top of the stove? Yes, oh, a few cockroaches was up there--that didn't bother nothing. They loved me, they bit the hell out of me! (laughter) And, you know, we had them--

you see, I had the leather shoes on when you saw that picture, but, we had them wrap-tie. And the only place they'd bite me was between the shoe and there. And they would bite the devil out of me sometimes. But, we had to sleep. We couldn't stay up all night fighting bugs. (laughs)

And then one place, I guess, was we moved into a little town, Shushka. And the officers had a quarters there, a great big house. They are nice looking homes, you know. They're all made with logs. And they're all hemp-packed. You take a rope, and that's hemp, and you pound that in there for heat. That keeps the cold air out. And we went in there, and Captain Axtell come over. And he said, "Marxer, they said you was in the medical corps." Or, "You know more about bugs and stuff." And I said, "Well, what's the matter now?" He says, "God, you got to go over there. We went over there and slept 'cause we moved in yesterday. Ah!" he said, "It's just alive." I said, "It can't be. Not that nice place." So he sent us over there. We went over there, and we had a big pump that they had there that they got from the British. And they had some stuff-it's not like tar, and it smelt like Lysol, but it was tar. And we sprayed that thing upstairs--we started upstairs. And when you came downstairs, before you could get downstairs, you'd think it was raining. They were about that deep on the floor.

JOHNSON: Was that about half a foot?

MARXER: Oh, they were just coming right on down. They were just dropping out of that ceiling. And we shoveled them all out. But, oh, it stunk in there (laughter) from that damn tar. And it was like kerosene. The British had it. They used it

in other places, like in Africa, you know, see. The Britains were used to that kind of stuff, moving into these countries where the countries' governments had been overthrown and stuff, you know.

So we got them cleaned out finally, but, oh, there were some dandies. And the restrooms were what you had to watch, you know, for like diseases and stuff. I felt sorry for some of the troops. They'd break out from the rations, like mutton and greasy stuff you know. And some people can take it, and other people throw it out, see.

JOHNSON: Did the attitudes of the peasants toward the troops change while you were in Russia?

MARXER: Yes, When we landed at Archangel in September, there were kind of--it was kind of reaction--it was different, see. Like, you know, it was a different set-up. But, towards Christmas-time, in there, and the first of the year, it changed a little. Because the Americans were feeding them a little, too.

JOHNSON: So, the relations got--

MARXER: ...got better, yes. Oh, it got better towards the end. And when we left there in July they were all good about everything because we didn't gyp them or rob them or steal from them. But, I'll tell you, they took us at first. We'd go downtown in Archangel city, at first, and we'd go in a restaurant--you know the restaurants, all they had was horsemeat. And (laughter) that's right! And blue as the dickens. When we come in at first, it'd be like, oh, fifteen rubles. After we'd been there two weeks, it was sixty-five rubles. Then it went to a hundred

rubles for a steak. (laughs) But you didn't have steak--usually you had mutton over at your barracks. And you'd get a steak and if you didn't know it was horsemeat, what the hell--you ate it! (laughter) But oh, it was blue as the dickens, the steak. And the market-place was empty. In that spring, when we got ready to leave there it had quieted down, see. The infantry left. 'Cause they were parading in Detroit on the Fourth of July. And by that time, the vegetables started coming in from the farms. Then the Bolsheviki got in there, see.

But the Bolsheviki today is the ones that started getting these farmers organized, and getting things straightened up. Why, that's why they compete with us today. Maybe they've got some beautiful farms there right now where we were, see. Out there because very good country, good. That Dvina River is a mile and a half wide. And it backs way up and it's all black land, back in there. But there was no farms on it, see, under the tsar. He kept them down, down, down. He kept the peasants down, see. And that's where the trouble was, see. The rich was running the country when the Tsar was in there. And that's what the friction was with the Bolsheviki. See, the people are living better under the Bolsheviki than they were under the tsar. And that's what the trouble was. I studied a lot of that after I came home, about it. They then had the "Mad Monk"--Rasputin. You ought to get that book, you ought to read that book. That's a good book, The Mad Monk. That was the tsarina's boyfriend! (laughter)

JOHNSON: Where would you get the money to buy that stuff? I thought you didn't get paid while you were over there?

MARXER: We didn't get paid. I sold something. I had a warehouse full. I could sell anything (laughter). Cigarettes, God, that's what them guys were selling--cigarettes. Sure, they'd buy it. I didn't get paid until I got back to the states. And I remember I had a bunch of rubles, and we got ready to leave there, see. I didn't know what the devil I was going to do with them then. Couldn't take them to the bank. They'd investigate you if you did! (laughter) See, so we'd sell 'em stuff. And so, they--all of them, everybody--don't let these guys tell you that they didn't sell stuff--them boys, any of them buggers! They all sold stuff--Petropolous and all! And the infantry, too. When we got in to Brest, France, we had quite a lot of graft, all of us did. And we didn't know where to go. So, I went down to the 'Y", and they couldn't do anything for us. So, I went by, and I happened to see a Salvation Army Hut. And I went in there and there was a woman sitting there and I said, "We've got a bunch of rubles. We've just got--" She said, "Yes, I heard yous just came in today." And I said, "We got the boys over there, they got a lot of rubles and we can't--we don't know what to do with them" And I said, "These are the good rubles. These ain't the junks." Oh, when they overthrewed the government that time--God, a tableful of rubles like that were two for a penny at that time, in American money. They were down to about twenty for ten cents, you know.

LENNING: Which rubles were the bad rubles?

MARXER: From the Tsar, yes. They they turned around and manufactured the other rubles, see. And, when I went in to her, she said, "Sure. Have the boys figure out how much they are, and put them in envelopes, and I'll go to the bank and get them exchanged for

you." And she got them for us, too, that woman, the Salvation Army. The "Y" wouldn't do a thing for us. Oh, we had a hell of a time with the "Y", us guys, we (laughs)--ask them guys about the "Y"! They'll tell you!

JOHNSON: Did you notice any difference between the way the Russians felt towards the Americans and the way they felt towards the other allies?

MARXER: Well, they liked the Americans. But, here's the funny thing about a Russian. You would walk in a Russian house, and you'd have the same uniforms on, all of them, see. And the Russians would say, "Engliski?" "Ne Engliski, Amerikanski." "Oh, dobra Amerikanski!", and make like that. And then we'd catch them. We'd walk in the house, you know, and they'd say, "Engliski? Amerikanski?"...."Oh, Engliski--oh, dobra, Engliski." See, just the way the wind blew. It's all you who were, see. So that, you couldn't depend on that, see whether they like you or whether they didn't. Because one time they'd tell you you were all right, and then they'd say, "Amerikanski ne dobra"--meant no good, see. See, that's the way it worked over there. If they could get anything out of you, then you were a good sport. (laughter) Same in this country today! That's right.

JOHNSON: Did you have any contact with the engineers on the battle fronts?

MARXER: No.

JOHNSON: How did you feel about interfering in Russia's internal affairs?

MARXER: Well, it was something that you--I wouldn't know what to say about it sometimes. After you saw the condition of the country and how the poorer Russians lived, you wondered what the Tsar had did wrong. Because he was running the country and the rich were living--the Cossacks would come through and take--they told us that, the Russian Jews even told me that. They would come through and we'd have to hide every--they'd have stuff buried all over, you know, like food, and everything, behind their stores, and everything, you know. I'd get invited out once in a while, we would, to come to somebody's house, like at Christmas, and something, or Jewish holidays. And I wasn't a Jew, but they would invite you in, because I could talk a little German. And they would tell us that they had food buried. You'd wonder, where the devil did they get all this food? And they had food, you know, like, oh, carrots and stuff like that, and lettuce and stuff. They had it. But it was all buried in the back yard after they--they had someplace where they always farmed it--they raised it, see. So, it was one of those things. But, Archangel city was a modern city, it had streetcars and everything. Well, like the guys'd sit there, one of them running the motor in front and the other was collecting money in the back--rubles. Sure, we had streetcars.

And then, another thing, from Bakaritza station down there, across the river in the wintertime--that river froze over, you know--so you ran railroad trains across the river, from Bakaritza to Archangel. So, you could froze the ties in, you could run an engine and everything across, that's how thick the ice was. We used to ride the reindeer outfits--the Eskimos that came down from Lapland into Russia had reindeer. They had an all-bone sled, made out of whale bone, and a long hickey and we'd ride them things--pay them so much to go across the river. And then them little ones, they were

just, their skin would be like that. It was all covered with whale oil. They'd lay on the ice there.

JOHNSON: A pinkish color?

MARXER: Pinkish color. Put them to sleep--the mother would put them to sleep, you know, shake them like that on the ice, and there they'd lay. And the old man would take us across the river--but we'd pay him for it--with them reindeer. And once in a while we'd get a bottle of vodka and give him a drink, and he'd go a little faster. (laughter)

JOHNSON: How did you feel, though, about interfering in the internal affairs of Russia?

MARXER: I didn't like it. I don't like it. I don't believe in interfering in the other man's politics. That's his politics. The same as in this country. Republicans for this, and Democrats are this--that's their way of running a country. We can't change it. 'Cause the men just start stepping on it, then you get into trouble, and that's why we're having all arguments on politics in this country all the time. One says "Watergate this" and I said "Watergate that"--Watergate's a joke to me, anyway, because it makes me laugh. When we were kids, we used to get a quarter for sneaking into the saloons to steal the petitions--breaking into them--a little Republicans' Watergate! (laughter) Sure, that's life, that was kids. You know how it goes.

JOHNSON: Did you feel that way at that time?

MARXER: I did, towards the end, 'cause I felt sorry for the poor people of the country. Because the Tsar had lived like--oh, that

was an elaborate place up at Bakaritsa up there. Oh, God-- that mansion up there! And they'd have big parties, I guess, the boyars--'cause everybody, the villagers all talked about it--when the Tsar was here, when he'd come in the summer time, and the Cossacks'd all come, and everybody had to stay off the street because they were going to be there for the summer. Beautiful up there in the summertime, the sun up at 11:00 at night, just beautiful, you know, all fixed up and beautiful horses they must have had--I saw some pictures there of the horses. But, I don't know what it's all about now. But they came a long way. 'Cause that's the way it seems, in them conditions. They have. They've come a long way.

JOHNSON: Do you feel that there was any justification for the allied involvement?

MARXER: Well, the only reason was because the Germans were going to come--that was why we were there, to keep the Germans from coming in the back way.

JOHNSON: How about after the armistice?

MARXER: I don't know what they kept us up there for. I don't know what for, they kept us up there--we sat up there in July. And I was dishing out shovels--like we'd have to go out there and dig, you see. And a lot of them got killed even after that. We'd have to go out and bury them. Got one of the guys that'd bring the shovel--he'd bring me back two--the handle and the other part. They busted them. They wasn't going to dig no graves or do any road work or anything, after the armistice was signed in France. I don't blame them. I didn't like it one bit.

LENNING: How prevalent was that attitude?

MARXER: Oh, towards the end the attitudes--oh, very prevalent. Towards the end it did. You see, because it was getting to that. They wanted to get home, see. So, when I came home they said--the first thing, going looking for a job--"Well, you must have been in prison. God, everybody's been home here a year now." That's right. I got that thrown in my face more than once--"Where in the hell was you, Marxer?" I says, "I was up in Russia." "What the hell did you do wrong? They must have had you in the coop up there!" That's the answer we got, see, us that come home late. See, the infantry was home, and all discharged. God, I remember when we got to Camp Sheridan, then I had all them supplies to check in. And I had them all there, and I had dished in, except the helmets. And then the guys gave me the helmets back; we had a whole bunch of extra helmets and stuff. And I walked into Camp Sheridan, and I had all my records there and the guy said to me--this was over in Ohio here--and there was only six of us: one of the mess sergeants and I and Eddy Haines, we went over to the sable sergeant and he had all the bills to check off--record--the guy said, "What the hell am I going to do with that? What are you bringing them over here to me for?" And I said, "Well, we were told we had to have records so we could get our discharge." He said, "I don't want your damn junk." And I had all them helmets. I must have had--oh, and I had everything else. He said, "Throw them over in the warehouse if you want." I wanted to get home, so I said to him, "When can you okay us our discharge?" "Well," he says, "next Monday." And we says, "Can we have them helmets?" So, I sent every kid in Muskegon a helmet. Fifteen cents. We went down to the post office Saturday

morning--that guy in the post office was 'bout ready to kill me down there! I know I sent every kid up there a helmet. I saw them supplies that came out of Russia with us, what we brought back from there. They went right down the slide, like that, right into the fire. Tires, never been on a ramp--thousands and thousands of dollars, and this was no joke. I got a lot of guys that were with me that will swear to it.

LENNING: Where did they burn them?

MARXER: Burn them? In Brest, France. Went down the slide off the boat.

JOHNSON: Why did they even bother to cart them over there?

MARXER: There would be a surplus in France. See, that's what they'd say. I bought sealskins up there in the fur stores for ten cents. Beautiful. Big ones. All kinds. Beautiful stuff. Had them all in barracks bags, thought I was going to get them to America, (laughs) they went down the slides! See, I was in charge of supplies, so I was the first man off the transport. And here I was loading them all on these trucks, and I said, "Where are they taking.." "Oh, they'll show you." Guys were all lined up there. Down they went. That slide, it was probably, like, one of them big sand dunes down there, right down in Holland--the big sand dunes there. Right down the slide they'd have metal hickies sliding down to those gas furnaces that would burn them all up. The army could have left them in France, but there would be a surplus, see, and they didn't know where to store them. See, and this was pretty near a year after the armistice, and we were there still. I don't know what they ever brought them back

for. They did. Made me shudder sometimes, when I thought of all that stuff, when I got back and tried to buy a suit of clothes with that little bonus you got. (laughs)

JOHNSON: Did you serve with any of the other allied troops?

MARXER: Yes. The French and English were in, next to us, and Canadians, I like the Canadians. The Canadians were real guys. Yes, they were real soldiers. There were a bunch of Canadians right next to--artillery unit--(Mac---, Mac---They were all the same). They were good soldiers.

JOHNSON: How about the French?

MARXER: French? Oh, well, they were tired. They were all tired. They had to have their wine. They always had their wine! (laughter) One time I'll never forget--this is a nice story--The French came in, and the boat came in from France. And they had them hogshead of wine--God, they were (gestures) they had the big ones--God, like that--and it rolled off the boat into the Dvina River. God, I never saw so many (crying noises) (laughter) Damn frogs, they were running all around with their mouths open--"What's the matter?" "(sobbing)" And there it was--it had rolled off the boat, off the little tugboat they had there that had got it off the transport. I could have died. They was always giving us wine. And they kept saying, "You no more get? You no more get?" I says, "What are you talking about?"--I wouldn't get any more if I didn't help them get it out of there. I bet there was fifty Frenchmen out there--they rolled it up--they got it up! They never worked that hard in their life! They were good soldiers, though, the Frenchmen were. They had

had enough of the war.

The ones I felt sorry for--the last troops that come up from England, after we'd been there about three months that winter--they were the little Royal Scots. They had been hurt in France. And they were sent up there to soldier. And some of them were shot in the leg, you know how that would be, how cold it is. And their equipment was all right. They couldn't soldier, they couldn't stand post, or march, or anything like that because the guys had been, you know, been hurt in the service before and they sent them up there--called the Royal Scots. They were good little guys. I felt so sorry for them because they were casualties, you know, they were hurt, see. England came out of it all right because they shipped all the hemp back; everytime the transport would go back, it would go back loaded with stuff from Russia. Like hemp, and stuff--motors, and everything like that. They didn't pay anything for them--they got them for nothing. The country was in that shape.

JOHNSON: Did you think that England was involved in Russia basically for her own benefit?

MARXER: It got plenty for it. Our equipment cost plenty, oh...

JOHNSON: Did you realize that at the time?

MARXER: I did at the time. After we'd been there about six or seven months, then I would start to realize what's going on. 'Cause you know, man--and I think the Russians realized it, too. And, you see, there was nobody to stop them. They brought us up and they shipped us up there.

JOHNSON: How did that affect your attitude toward the British?

MARXER: Oh, it got kind of rough towards the end. Like Ironsides, he was all right, but his troops were always dressed up. They didn't soldier. We did the dirty work at that time. That's what these guys will tell you, too. And so they didn't have much use for the British.

JOHNSON: Did the British direction of the expedition affect the morale of the troops?

MARXER: Ohhh, yes.

JOHNSON: Did you ever feel as though you were over there working for the British instead of the Americans?

MARXER: Yes, you did. When they'd hand you the rations, see, --'cause I was in charge of all them supplies and stuff. And when you see all them bicycles and all this junk coming in there at that warehouse and all charged back to us--I had to sign for all that stuff--and you wondered where it went. We never shipped it back; we never shipped that stuff from the warehouse. We shipped other stuff back, like surplus tires and stuff, and it all went on the transport from another warehouse way down in Murmansk, see--not in Archangel. We had warehouses in Murmansk. And a lot of that stuff was on the boats when we went back to Brest. But that stuff that was in Archangel was all charged back to us--like clothing and all that stuff that we had paid for all that. Oh, they made money on that stuff. See, we had no American equipment at all; it was all British. The guns I even had were British. And that was the feeling--see, the feeling was very low towards the end. Even the shelves I had

in the warehouse were all British-made, see, and we had oodles of them here in this country that we could have brought.

JOHNSON: Were the flags also British?

MARXER: Yes, everything. And cigarettes and stuff like that, and stuff that would like--'cause I never smoked in my whole life, I haven't. But one day I was in the warehouse, and my friend says to me, "You want to see something funny, Rudy?" I said, "What?" And he says, "I was just over at the "Y" hut. The guy over there said he had a few surplus on cigarettes, and I wanted to buy some." And I said, "Well, what do you mean?" And he said, "Well, they're selling them out. That means they're going to move out." They had a "Y" hut there, not right there in Bakaritza, but down over there where we got across the river. And he says, "I see they say 'Donated by the City of Grand Rapids'." And he was buying them from the "Y". I went down and I said to the guy down there, "What's this?" "Ooh," he said, "did you get a donation?" I said, "You sold these to one of my sergeants." And I said, "I'm from Grand Rapids, and I don't like you to be stealing these from Grand Rapids." And he said to me, "What do you mean?" And I said, "Well, just a minute. Give me them two you got right there in your hand that you were going to sell to me." "Oh!" he said. "I was going to give them to you." And I said, "No you weren't. You got anymore of them?" And he said, "Why?" And I said, "You better not, because here's one that's stamped "City of Grand Rapids." And it was from some club--some women's club from a church out on Division Street. I could tell because there was a sticker on them inside.

JOHNSON: How much of that kind of graft went on at the "Y".

MARXER: I don't know. Sometimes I wondered about it. I never complained about it, but some of the boys did complain terribly. It was all right, but now like when we were stationed in Aldershot in England, there was no "Y" around there, you know. And we went down to London a couple of times, and every time we'd get down to the city, the "Y" hut was full. And it would be like on Saturday 'cause we'd get down over there for a while, and we'd catch a train and go down. And we'd get there, and there was no way of calling them and we'd have to go to some cheap joint down the street, you see. And everybody got the feeling that there was no room for the Americans. And then the doughnuts and stuff the Salvation Army was always doing for all the charity, you know. And then there was another outfit there that had a green outfit--green suits on, from America, and they were from New York State. They were always getting stuff for us--anything we needed, you know. But there was a bad feeling about the "Y" throughout the whole thing, you know. I don't know how the second one come out, but not too many of them were enthused about them in the First World War. But they'd come to us like that--the engineering units and stuff--and tell us that they couldn't do this, and it was just like when I went there and asked about the money. Oh, they couldn't do nothing about that. And I said, "Well, aren't you changing the Frenchmen's money?" And "Oh, they have to take care of that themselves, you know." Well, that woman said, "Be sure and bring it down." And I brought her a whole bunch of envelopes and she had the money right in the box. And I got the money but there was a bad feeling.

JOHNSON: So the "Y" people weren't very helpful?

MARXER: No. After that deal with the cigarettes from Grand Rapids, I was all up to there with them.

JOHNSON: Did they charge for all their services?

MARXER: No. No, they'd give out coffee and stuff like that when they had it there, you know. We'd go in there and you could buy it less than going to the restaurants. But half the time they wouldn't be open, you know, see; whereas you were always welcome at the Salvation Army.

LENNING: What did you say before about the flags? Was the American flag flying in many places?

MARXER: Not very many places, no. Not very many places. No.

JOHNSON: How about over a headquarters company, or something?

MARXER: Like that it would be all right. Like where we were over at Bakaritsa there, see, or over the engineering headquarters; but not very many others. They were mostly British flags and Russian flags. There were not too many Russian flags at that time, either, because it was just in between, see, the Bolsheviks and the Tsar.

The poor people, you know, they wanted to go to church because it was a religious country as the dickens under the Tsar, see. He kept them under his thumb, see, with the church. And that's what made the Bolsheviks mad and that's why they throwed the churches out, see. The Tsar used the church as a crutch to keep him in power, see.

LENNING: Did you ever run into any Bolshevik propaganda?

MARXER: No I never did. No. Not at that time. But they always kept saying "Bolshoi, Bolshoi"--meant "big", see.

LENNING: Did the British also employ propaganda?

MARXER: Not too much. A little bit, probably. When Ironside was there, he kind of preached that, you know. And he wouldn't let like the guards and stuff in the warehouses. You know, we had guys on the gate, but he'd have two or three British standing there right beside them, see, to watch them, so they wouldn't steal the supplies. And most of it was paid for by American supply company, you know.

LENNING: Did any of the letters which you received from home mention news reports of the expedition that had been in Muskegon papers?

MARXER: Yes, I used to get one once in a while from my mother, but they censored all that stuff, you know. After that, it'd be all chopped to pieces. And the same went for anything we'd send out. It was all censored, too, you know.

LENNING: They censored mail that you received?

MARXER: Yes. Oh, yes, they censored it. They wanted to know why we wasn't coming home and all that stuff, but there would be little certain pieces cut out, like on what they had read in the paper.

LENNING: And then you couldn't tell...

MARXER: ...what it was, yes. (laughs) See, they'd scratch it out. But anything we sent from up there, oh, it would be all

scratched up. Some of them guys, oh, they'd write some dandies! (laughs) And you couldn't sneak them out because they went right through the censors, you know. They all went through England.

LENNING: What about the American Sentinel?

MARXER: We didn't have any up there. I never saw one up there. I'd never seen the Sentinel while I was up there in Archangel, unless they didn't get it over to Bakaritza. They probably had it over in Archangel city. But I never saw it. Some of them, did they have them up there?

LENNING: It was first published in December of 1918. It was a paper just for the American troops. It was published in Archangel.

JOHNSON: It was sort of like the Stars and Stripes.

MARXER: Yes, I know that was there.

LENNING: How did you spend holidays?

MARXER: Oh, it was just a day of messing around. Ringing the bells on Easter, up in the church steeples, you know. They celebrated the holidays and had fun. Well, but most of the time we were busy in the supply outfit, getting that stuff up to the front, see.

LENNING: What about the Red Cross? Did you have any dealings with them?

MARXER: Not too much, no. I had very little to do with the Red Cross. I was in supplies too. I don't know--I think--there was no Salvation Army unit up there in Archangel district, see. The "Y" was up there, and I think the Red Cross was. But

I never got anything from them up there. And I know that some of them guys said they got a jackknife someplace. And maybe that was in England when we were stationed there. I think that was in England that they got a jackknife. The Red Cross give it to them. But that's about all we had to do with them.

LENNING: When did you first discover that the American troops were evacuating?

MARXER: About, oh, I would say.... We got out of there in July--and they were parading then. I think that probably in February I knew somebody was moving out--in February.

LENNING: How did you feel when the other troops left and the Engineers were still there?

MARXER: You wondered what the devil was going on. You wondered what the dickens was going on up there, see. And here is the funny part of it: there was my mother, Mrs. Gersh, and Mrs. Shepherd, and they belonged to that Christian church in Muskegon. And they wondered why their boys weren't home. You see, the infantry had all come home. So they went to the mayor of Muskegon. (laughs) They went to the mayor, "Why aren't my boys coming home?" And of course, he said, "Well, I can't do anything about it. Then I got one letter that was in the mail before Christmas and this was 'way up in May. Oh, some of that stuff, like the Christmas packages, it would be, were on the transport that was coming into Murmansk in order to get to Archangel it went to Murmansk. And then they put it on a tugboat up the Dvina River. And then, you know, it had been out in the North Sea, and all that water had been all over it--that ruined the cookies! (laughs)

They were all cracked and just destroyed! And that was the Christmas package.

LENNING: Did you think that you might have to remain in Russia another year?

MARXER: Well, I knew we were leaving because of the supplies. I knew that we were going to leave pretty soon. But you couldn't tell just when it was. When it came, it came like a shock, because they had had all that dysentery and stuff up there. Some of the guys...and they was getting it in that uptown, you know, in that Solombo Station. And that's where it hit, down below there. And, oh, those mosquitos were stinging them. That's when they finally found out that it was the mosquitos that was causing all that dysentery and stuff. And, boy, it was rough.

LENNING: How did you feel about the American troops evacuating before the affair in North Russia was "finished?"

MARXER: Well, we wanted--all we wanted was to know what it was all about, see. And we came sailing into Brest, France, and everything had been over there for so long, and things were quieting down, and we sailed in there and pulled into port, and one guy was at the dock there, and he said, "Where have you guys been?" And I said, "We've just pulled in from Russia." "Well," he said, "The Russian gang passed through here five months ago." I said, "I know." See, that was the infantry who passed through. And he was in charge of the warehouse over there. And I said, "We've been up there waiting for them to drag us out of there." And he said, "Well, how was it up there?" I said, "Well, it's all right, I guess. I don't know what to tell you. It wasn't any

good." And then the first thing he said, "What the hell was you doing up there?" (laughs) That's about it, see. Everybody wanted to know. And they're still asking. (laughter) They are! They're still asking!

LENNING: Did you discover that many people had heard about your expedition?

MARXER: Well, everybody knew about it then--after we got home. But before that I guess they didn't publish too much about it.

LENNING: Had they heard an accurate account?

MARXER: No, no. I don't think--after we had been home a long, long, time. I know--some church where we went wanted me to come to church and tell their kids about it, see. And I said "But, what will I tell them?" And they wanted to know all about Bolshevism, you know, and stuff. "Well, we'd better keep quiet until we've found out what this is all about. I can tell you all about it: the Tsar was overthrown, but that's all." But then the minister kept asking me, "What did they overthrow the Tsar for?" I said, "I guess he wasn't running the country well." He says to me, "Will it be any better under Bolshevism?" And then I said, "Will the kids ask me that?" And he said, "Yes." And I said, "Well, I can't touch it." I don't know. It seems that when we left everybody had an idea that we wouldn't be long up there--quite a few of us did, anyway--'cause we was up there waiting and the company was getting bitter.

LENNING: Looking back on the expedition today, can you see any real purpose to it?

MARXER: I don't know what. The only purpose that I can tell them is that they were going to stop the Germans from coming in the back way to England, and I think that's the only reason that was ever given to any of the troops.

LENNING: But there's never been any explanation given as to why you remained and fought after the armistice?

MARXER: No, there wasn't. Not one. And we could never figure out why we remained up there after the infantry was pulled out. Because the soldiers went and the engineers remained. We had a lot of college men who'd been going to school, you know, and in fact, oh, three or four of them had been going down to Valparaiso University to school before they went in the service. And they wanted to get back to school. There was no G.I. bill back then, at that time, like now...not a thing. Just the gassed men, they got a pension. Those that were gassed in France. We didn't get any pensions or stuff like that except for the bonus money. And then we had to apply for that. I put \$35 into that bonus fund and went into Washington to get that bonus money before the depression hit. Thirty-five dollars; and \$35 would be like \$115 now.

LENNING: Several accounts of the Allied expedition claim that the British used the Americans for their own purposes, and that they placed excessive hardships on them in order to pressure Washington into sending more troops. What is your opinion of this claim?

MARXER: I do, I do, I absolutely do believe that. Because they were crying their eyes out, up there in Russia, that they were doing all the work, and we weren't doing anything--and we were

doing all the work and they weren't doing nothing, you know. And we had to buy all that stuff from them. They like that, you know--they could sell all them supplies back to us. Everything was stored in England--in France, too--they stored it, and they charged everything they stored there--we paid for. Yes, I know. They had warehouses full of stuff.

When we were getting started there near Aldershot, a place called Guilford, where the ammunition was all made, and we had some trucks and we had to go over there for something--some guns or something. And we took these two British lorries over there to get them. And I said, "Where are the American guns?" "There are no American guns here," he said. I said, "What are you talking about?" I said, "I left Camp Mills, Long Island--we had warehouses full." "Oh," he said, "they must not be any good." So we had all these British rations going up in there. They made some money on that deal up there.

LENNING: Did your experience in Northern Russia affect your outlook on life?

MARXER: No. I come back, I was a happy-go-lucky guy. A kid, (laughs) you know, just full of hell, just looking to get back here. (laughs) But it made you feel that, God, you'd wasted a couple of years of your life. Some of these guys went way out. Come back and started thinking that they couldn't get jobs. We lost a lot of them the first couple of years after we'd been back.

JOHNSON: Lost them?

MARXER: Died. Fellows, like that had been gassed. And you know that bridge at Grand Haven, we had two on there. You see, that's

the only jobs that they could get. They couldn't get jobs in factories, see. They got gassed, some, and some of them got shot and there was no G.I. Bill for them to go to school on. They didn't have one. And their pensions was so darn small that they couldn't do much with it. One hundred and thirty-five was the highest pension a man could get from them after the First World War. That was the highest pension. And that's not very much to live on. And guys who were paralyzed, you didn't know what to do about them.

I have a very good friend that was in the artillery in France, and he lost his hearing. He couldn't hear a thing. You know what kind of business he was in before? He was a man who worked on safes in stores. And so, he couldn't work no more. Boy, we put out applications, you know, and wrote the Federal Government. Finally, it got so he could hear a little bit, but he couldn't do no business because he couldn't hear the clicking. But before he went in the service he had made a study of that, and he could open a safe, like in a bank when the banks opened in the morning and something went wrong--he could go in and get that safe open. He went down to nothing. He lost weight. And he finally got him a little hearing.

Got any more?

LENNING: Is there anything else that you would like to say about your experience in Northern Russia?

MARXER: I had a few girls up there, Dasha and Paula, so put that on there too. (laughter) That's all. Thank you kids. Now, if you want anything else, let us know and we'll be down.

LENNING: Thank you.